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ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, fathering programs of various kinds have proliferated in a number of different contexts. These programs are faced with two critical issues. The first is the need for a practical, inclusive, yet challenging framework to guide effective practice in diverse settings. This review presents a definition of good fathering as generative fathering, and describes a conceptual model of reflective practice as applied to fathering programs. The presentation of the model of reflective practice includes discussions of practitioner relationships, characteristics of reflective practice in action, and critical virtues for practitioners. The review then outlines the potential positive and negative impacts of reflective practice on fathering programs. The review concludes with an agenda for practitioner/researcher collaboration. (Contains 74 references.) (Author/KB)

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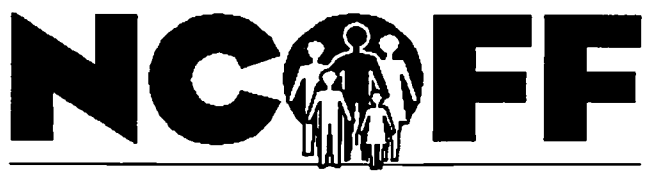

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PREFACE

Not since the 1960s and 1970s—when research in the field was at a peak —have family issues captured as much attention or sparked as much wide-scale debate as they have in recent years. Casting its net to address a variety of problems that fall outside the typical domains of psychology and sociology (where much of the early work was located), research on families is part of a growing interdisciplinary focus which is no longer simply implicated in questions about family development. Rather, the present interdisciplinary focus of the field attempts to respond to massive changes in the needs, structures, poverty levels, and formation patterns of families and the policies that are designed to remedy the increasingly complex problems they face.

A significant and compelling part of research on families over the past 20 years explores the impact of father involvement and father absence on children's development and complements much of the existing research on issues in other areas—e.g., female-headed households, poverty, social welfare, and public policy. In particular, the potential impact of family support legislation, national welfare reform agendas, and persistent systemic problems at local and state levels lend a sense of urgency to the research discussion about father participation in families. What is noticeably lacking in these discussions, however, is a focus on programs that serve fathers and families and the voices of practitioners.

The issues defining and surrounding research and practice on fathers and families are complex. Nested in each issue are multiple layers of questions about the problems facing young fathers, mothers, and families; the needs of programs and the practitioners who work in them; changes in national, state, and local policies; and the nature of the tasks facing society. Although there is substantial discussion about the impact of father absence, research studies provide only modest evidence for the negative consequences of father absence on children and typically attribute these negative effects to reduced family income resulting from separation or divorce. There are only sparse data on families that deviate from "traditional, intact" family forms such as families headed by adolescent or young, adult never-married, and/or poor mothers. Research on families of color, outside of poverty studies, are still conspicuously meager in the knowledge base.

The work of the National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF) uses the strengths and voids in these research discussions as a launching pad to develop a framework for research, practice, and policy—to promote the building of a field in which the needs of children and families are the core of the discourse and research and practice cohere to craft the language and activities associated with that discourse. NCOFF aims to bring together these issues within a research and collaborative effort on behalf of children and their families.

Established in July 1994 with core funding from The Annie E. Casey Foundation, NCOFF's mission is to improve the life chances of children and the efficacy of families by facilitating the effective involvement of fathers. Developed in the spirit of the Philadelphia Children's Network's (PCN) motto, "Help the children. Fix the system.", NCOFF

seeks to increase and enrich the possibilities for children, ensuring that they are helped and that the system allows for and encourages the participation of fathers in their children's lives. NCOFF shares with PCN and other field activities the premises that children need loving, nurturing families; that mothers and families in general need to be supported in providing nurturance; and that family support efforts should increase the ability of both parents and adults within and outside the biological family to contribute to children's development and well-being.

NCOFF's mission is developed around seven **Core Learnings**. The Core Learnings provide the context for NCOFF's research agenda. This research agenda is intended to support the field in the development, conduct, and advancement of research, practice, and responsive policies. Research activities are designed to synthesize work from multiple disciplines, provide current analyses, and examine emerging conceptualizations in the field. In this and all of its work, NCOFF recognizes that the scope of need in the field requires a variety of approaches and the commitment and collective effort of different communities.

This Monograph is intended to highlight critical and emerging topics in the field that have received minimal attention and that complement issues identified in the NCOFF FatherLit Database, Briefs, critical literature reviews, and research reports. The Database combines citation lists, annotated bibliographies, and abstracts of research articles, reports, and volumes that focus on issues implied in the Core Learnings. All NCOFF documents are written and reviewed by scholars representing multiple disciplines and research interests in fathers and families. Information about the NCOFF Database, the literature reviews and analyses, working papers, and other NCOFF documents and activities is currently available on HandsNet and through our website.

Embedded in NCOFF's mission is a vision in which fathers, families, and communities are positioned to ensure the well-being of children and are able to translate their hope and the possibilities that accompany that hope into human and social prosperity. A well-coordinated national effort on fathers and families will give support and a collective voice to programs, encourage research, and contribute to responsive policy formulation. Such a vehicle would provide the appropriate context for experience-sharing among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers; identification of basic research, program, and policy-related issues; surfacing of new research issues; and increased opportunities for communication, cooperation, and collaboration.

Vivian L. Gadsden
Director

SEVEN CORE LEARNINGS

- Fathers care — even if that caring is not shown in conventional ways.
- Father presence matters — in terms of economic well-being, social support, and child development.
- Joblessness is a major impediment to family formation and father involvement.
- Existing approaches to public benefits, child support enforcement, and paternity establishment operate to create systemic obstacles and disincentives to father involvement. The disincentives are sufficiently compelling as to have prompted the emergence of a phenomenon dubbed "underground fathers"—men who acknowledge paternity and are involved in the lives of their children but who refuse to participate as fathers in the formal systems.
- A growing number of young fathers and mothers need additional support to develop the vital skills to share the responsibility for parenting.
- The transition from biological father to committed parent has significant development implications for young fathers.
- The behaviors of young parents, both fathers and mothers, are influenced significantly by intergenerational beliefs and practices within families of origin.

The seven Core Learnings are at the heart of NCOFF's agenda for research, practice, and policy and are a framework for the field. They represent the knowledge and experience of practitioners who confront complex problems facing fathers and families and are consistent with research across multiple disciplines. They offer an important lens through which policymakers might learn more about the implications and impact of legislation and policy decisions on the lives of large numbers of fathers, mothers, children, and families. Within them are captured salient issues experienced and felt deeply by a range of fathers and families—from those who are financially secure to those who are the most vulnerable to poverty and hardship.

The Core Learnings were identified immediately prior to NCOFF's inception by frontline practitioners in a series of survey and focus group activities conducted by the Philadelphia Children's Network and NCOFF. Formulated first as seven hypotheses drawn from practitioners' experiences in programs serving fathers and families, each hypothesis was tested against existing published research and policy studies. As each hypothesis was borne out in the literature, it became a Core Learning. A library of information was developed for each. The resultant seven libraries now constitute the NCOFF FatherLit Database and include over 7,000 citations, annotations, and abstracts of research, available in written, diskette, and electronic form.

National Center on Fathers and Families

Developing a Model of Reflective Practice
for Improving Fathering Programs
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Abstract

Over the past decade, fathering programs of various kinds have proliferated in a number of different contexts. These programs are faced with two critical issues. The first is the need for a practical, inclusive, yet challenging framework to guide effective practice in diverse settings. A definition of good fathering as generative fathering is presented. A conceptual model of reflective practice as applied to fathering programs is described. The presentation of the model of reflective practice includes discussions of practitioner relationships, characteristics of reflective practice in action, and critical virtues for practitioners. The potential positive and negative impacts of reflective practice on fathering programs are outlined. The paper concludes with an agenda for practitioner/researcher collaboration.

The National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF) is a policy research center that is practice-focused and practice-derived. Based in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania, NCOFF's mission is to improve the life chances of children and the efficacy of families by facilitating the effective involvement of fathers in caring for, supporting, and advocating on behalf of their children. Efforts are organized around three interdependent approaches: a policy research and policymakers engagement component, program development, and dissemination activities. NCOFF's research plan is developed around seven "Core Learnings," distilled from the experiences of programs and agencies serving fathers, mothers, and children around the country.

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About the Author

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The proliferation of fathering programs in a variety of settings during the early 1980s (Klinman & Kohl, 1984) and a second wave of programs in the 1990s (Kane, Gadsden, & Armorer, 1997; Levine & Pitt, 1995) represent a new field of practice in parent and family education. Fathering programs are quite varied. For example, a program might involve a group of older, middle-class fathers attending a parenting class in a suburb of Minneapolis with their 2-year-olds; a group of young unmarried fathers attending a class on infant care at a hospital in Indianapolis; or a group of Head Start fathers in a rural area in Washington coming together on Saturday mornings to fix equipment at the Early Childhood Center. Fathering programs are responses to a variety of social and economic forces, including mothers' participation in the work force, an increase in births to unmarried parents, new expectations for male involvement in parenting, and men wanting to be closer to their children than their fathers were to them. Fathering programs have been developed with different populations of men to address many different concerns and encompass a variety of goals. The field is in its infancy and is developing at a rapid pace.

This paper will address two major issues that fathering programs face in the late 1990s. The first issue is the need for a guiding image of good fathering that can be applied to the diverse range of fathering programs that currently exist. The second issue is the identification of effective practice, moving beyond specific case studies to a more comprehensive approach to fathering programs. NCOFF's Core Learnings (1995) and Roundtables began to move the field in this direction by outlining important principles and initiating dialogues between practitioners and researchers. This paper will present a framework for reflective practice for fathering programs and an outline of the next steps researchers and practitioners must take to improve practice.

AN OVERVIEW OF FATHERING PROGRAMS AND REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

A brief history of fathering programs reveals a number of important milestones. In 1984 *Fatherhood USA* (Klinman & Kohl, 1984) was published, describing numerous grassroots efforts all over the country and in a variety of settings that provided support for the growth of a new, more nurturant and involved fatherhood. During the late 1980s efforts directed towards helping teen fathers in urban areas also began to attract some attention (Sander, 1993; Achatz & MacAllum, 1994; Gadsden & Trent, 1995). Fathers' rights groups were also active in addressing legal rights of fathers during the 1980s (Bertoia & Drakich, 1995). The quiet revolution of nurturant, involved fatherhood of the 1980s has exploded into a new level of activity and awareness around fatherhood in the early 1990s. The National Center for Fathering was established in Kansas to create a research model of effective fathering. Head Start initiated efforts to increase male involvement during the early 1990s (Levine, 1993). The 1994 conference in Nashville organized by Vice President Gore and the concurrent Father Re-engagement Round Table organized by the Philadelphia Children's Network brought practitioners, advocates, researchers and policymakers together (NCOFF, 1995a).

The 1994 Family Re-Union III conference coincided with specific initiatives to support practitioners working with fathers. The National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF) at the University of Pennsylvania was established as a policy research center that is practice-focused. The Father Policy Institute was created in Chicago to engage practitioners in policy discussions (NCOFF, 1995a) and FatherNet, a computer network based at the University of Minnesota, was created to help link researchers, practitioners, and fathers. These initiatives, especially NCOFF and FatherNet, were created to provide some direct support to practitioners. FatherNet provides an opportunity to share research and views via the Internet. NCOFF has developed a research base around core learnings from practitioners and has organized a series of round table conferences to explore and extend these learnings (e.g., Arendell, 1996; NCOFF, 1995b, 1995c).

A number of other national-level activities during the 1990s have also focused on fatherhood. These initiatives include the National Fatherhood Initiative, Promise Keepers, and the Father-to-Father program. The number of programs that provide support and education for fathers appears to be growing with new state, federal, and foundation funding initiatives around fathering. The learnings about fathers and programs were captured by the National Practitioners' Network meeting in 1994, and NCOFF has continued to build a research database that expands on these learnings. A next step in the development of fathering programs is to outline a conceptual model that describes and articulates practitioners' perspectives and begins to assess effective practice in a more systematic manner (McBride & Palm, 1992). This paper will present a model of reflective practice intended to help guide practitioners through the current flurry of activity focused on fatherhood.

Definitions

The focus of this paper is the various initiatives to educate and support fathers that have been referred to as fathering programs (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1996). Fathering programs include a variety of services, including comprehensive services for young unmarried fathers, involvement of fathers in preschool programs, family literacy programs, support groups for fathers of children with disabilities, parent and family education programs for fathers, and workplace education and support efforts for fathers. Levine & Pitt's (1995) examination of the range of fathering programs showed that such programs span a variety of agencies (social service, early childhood, health care, education, correctional facilities, job services) and also serve fathers in a wide range of age groups.

The practitioners in fathering programs have not been clearly delineated as a group (Kane, Gadsden, Armorer, 1997). It appears that men and women who work with fathers come from a variety of backgrounds, including parenting education, social work, health care, early childhood education, and counseling/therapy. There appear to be two types of professionals involved in supporting fathers. One group works directly with fathers and their families providing educational and support services. Another group works indirectly with fathers by developing curriculum materials and programs while training volunteers or paraprofessionals to work with fathers. They produce mass media, including books, magazines, radio, video, and computer networks which play an important role in exploring fatherhood and supporting fathers. This paper will focus on fathering programs where practitioners provide services directly to individual fathers and/or groups of fathers.

Reflective practice is the central concept to be explored in this paper. This is a term that has

been used in education as a general description of teachers as developing professionals. Reflective practice is defined by Kirby & Paradise (1992) as "the integration of research, theory and experience in the formulation of solutions to problems of practice that are complex and unique." This concept will be applied as a useful and relevant paradigm for building effective programs for fathers and their families.

Good Fathering and Higher Standards A clear conceptual definition of good fathering is essential to guiding effective practices in fathering programs. The term "good fathering" has been chosen to emphasize the point that the conduct of fatherhood is primarily a moral and ethical issue, not an empirical issue (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1996). Fathering programs by their nature support and teach good fathering. A clear definition of good fathering is necessary in guiding programs and fathers in the development of meaningful goals. A brief review of recent descriptions of good fathering and the inevitable tension between absolutist and relativist perspectives will introduce the concept of generative fathering (Dollahite, Hawkins and Brotherson, 1997) as a balanced and practical approach to thinking about good fathering for the 21st century.

The role of fatherhood has been in a state of flux for the last two decades (Palm & Palkovitz, 1988; LaRossa, 1988; Griswold, 1993). This state of flux has made consensus about a definition of good fathering difficult if not impossible. Professionals working with fathers may find themselves caught in a web of competing perspectives about good fathering. The confusion about good fathering has been exacerbated by social changes and by the emphasis during the 1980s on cultural and family diversity. This emphasis on diversity during the 1980s (e.g., Hanson & Bozett, 1985, 1991; Lamb, 1987) moved us toward a more relativist perspective on good fathering (Kipnis, 1987). This perspective captured the complexity of modern family life and cautioned professionals to make few negative judgments about fathering unless a father had clearly crossed over into abandonment or abuse. Within this climate it was difficult to discuss the shifting boundaries of good fathering. The problem with a relativist position on fathering is that it allows individual men to set their own standards to suit their own preferences and discourages debate about the meaning of good fathering. This inevitably has led to a general lowering of standards and a lack of clarity about the meaning of good fathering (Jackson, 1994; Palm, 1995).

Feminist perspectives (e.g., Backett, 1987; Thompson & Walker, 1989; Hochschild, 1989; Ehrensaft, 1990) and the changing role of mothers have brought a different voice and emphasis to the question of good fathering. This perspective began to emphasize the ethic of equality of household work and child care as the standard for measuring good fathering. One way researchers began to assess good fathering was by comparing the amount of fathers' involvement with the amount of mothers' involvement (Lamb et al., 1987). While some researchers saw men moving towards this new ideal of involved fatherhood (Pleck, 1985; Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, & Levine, 1987; Jump & Haas, 1987; McBride & Mills, 1993), other researchers saw a different picture and described progress towards shared involvement as slow (LaRossa, 1988; Hochschild, 1989; Pleck, 1996).

This emphasis on household work and child care as important roles for male parents creates some ambiguity as a moral guide to good fathering, since these roles continue to be discounted by society. This perspective on good fathering emphasizes roles where men have traditionally been less involved and competent. Good fathering from this perspective has clear standards but at the same time is measured in comparison to past standards for good mothering, which creates a deficit

model as a guide to good fathering (Doherty, 1991). Feminist perspectives help shed some light on the meaning of good fathering and areas where men can improve by greater sharing of child care and family work (Hawkins & Roberts, 1992), but this emphasis presents an incomplete and confusing picture. It also defines good fathering as an amount of involvement and thus makes it a simplistic, empirical question.

The search for the true meaning of "good fathering" and for accurate measures of father involvement has begun to incorporate positive parenting practices into operational definitions (Pleck, 1996). Involvement may be an important indicator of good fathering, but good fathering has other dimensions that may be both more important and more difficult to measure (i.e., the quality of father-child relationship, moral guidance, and thought process involved in parenting). Palkovitz (1997) has begun to outline a more detailed model of involvement that may move research beyond some of the current limitations.

The decade of the 1990s has led to several calls for higher standards for fatherhood. The "raising of standards" for fathers has been a theme promoted by many different leaders and organizations including the Promise Keepers (1995), Jesse Jackson (1994), David Blankenhorn (1995), and the National Fatherhood Initiative. This call for higher standards for fathers can be seen as an attempt to counteract the slide towards relativism that was pervasive in the family literature during the 1980s. The danger of this shift is the absolutist tone that comes with a call for higher standards and specific prescriptions for good fathering.

The "Good Family Man" Blankenhorn (1995) in his social critique of contemporary fatherhood reconstructs the "good family man" as his definition of good fathering. The "good family man" must be a provider, protector, partner in the family workload, and a spiritual/moral leader. Blankenhorn's view raises a specific set of standards that incorporates many of the roles fathers have played throughout history such as moral teacher, breadwinner, and nurturant father (Pleck, 1985). Blankenhorn's image also pushes good fathering towards a more absolutist view by prescribing roles that appear to exclude men who are not married, primary breadwinners, heads of families, and devout Christians. The standards are clear, and they portray high expectations and include a number of important functions of good fathering, yet they exclude men who are striving to do good fathering in difficult circumstances. Both Blankenhorn and the Promise Keepers movement remind us of the importance of raising standards for good fathering at a time when our standards have become fuzzy. While the "good family man" image is useful in defining specific roles and behavior, it will not be helpful to practitioners working with fathers who do not fit the parameters.

Responsible Fatherhood The term "responsible fatherhood" has begun to appear in a number of places (e.g., Levine & Pitt, 1995 and Doherty, Kouneski, and Erickson, 1996) as an explicitly value-laden description of fatherhood. The specificity of the Levine & Pitt (1995) model is another example of the move from empirical description to prescribing ethical and moral standards by using value statements to describe specific characteristics of good fathering. The responsible father, according to Levine and Pitt, will:

1. Wait to make a baby until he is emotionally and financially ready.
2. Establish legal paternity if and when he does make a baby.
3. Actively share with the mother in the continuing emotional and physical care of their child,

from pregnancy onwards.

4. Share with the child's mother in the continuing financial support of their child from pregnancy onwards.

The strengths of this definition are that it clearly delineates critical initial decision points (numbers 1 and 2) and it also addresses two major domains of fathering responsibility: providing and care giving. It is not as encompassing as Blankenhorn's "good family man" model, which adds protector and moral/spiritual leader to the list of roles. The Levine & Pitt definition of responsible fatherhood also is clearly connected to practice in fathering programs. The first two standards establish a specific set of ideals for "men/boys." They also place a clear emphasis on the need to create preventative services. The general theme of responsibility is a positive one and emphasizes the role of individual responsibility and the need to help individual fathers to share emotional and physical child care as well as provide financial support.

The problem with such standards is that they don't take into account the lives of many real fathers and don't recognize the ongoing process of adult development. The young unmarried father who is working hard to be a good father under very difficult circumstances may not meet any of these standards for responsible fatherhood. Yet his behavior may indicate important efforts to be a good father. He may not be a regular provider and may not share in the day-to-day care of his child. However, perhaps he is going to school to better his opportunities to be a provider. He is taking a parenting class to learn better ways to relate to his child. He calls his daughter on the phone and visits her weekly. He may be more motivated and making greater efforts towards good fathering than someone who has been judged a responsible (good) father by the new explicit standards. The young unmarried father may make valiant efforts to build and maintain a caring relationship with his child under difficult circumstances, while the older, married, employed father makes minimal attempts to spend time with his child. These standards for responsible fatherhood include an inherent negative bias towards young men, unmarried men, men of color, and unemployed men.

The current emphasis on "individual responsibility" for one's economic status, while it may be empowering, also can be misused to push a political agenda that emphasizes the provider role for fathers at a time when many men's ability to provide has eroded. This issue is more salient for minority fathers, working-class or under-class fathers, and young fathers. Men who may be at a disadvantage in becoming good providers need both support to do this part of fatherwork and jobs that can realistically support family life in the 1990s.

The challenge in raising standards is to become more inclusive of real efforts towards good fathering without slipping into relativistic views and accepting any standards an individual father wants to set.

Generative Fathering One of the important learnings about fathering in recent years has been the need to frame fathering as a developmental process (Newman & Newman, 1988; Cowan, 1988; Palkovitz, 1992; Palm, 1993; Snarey, 1993; Dollahite, Hawkins, & Brotherson, 1997). Fathering is an evolving relationship between father and child, not a static set of roles. The author has found himself challenged by experiences with a variety of men who do not meet the role requirements of a "good family man" yet appear to be working towards good fathering: for example, the 17-year-old father in prison who brightens when he talks about his 6-week-old daughter. His toughness begins to melt as he describes his recent visit with her and his delight with her first smiles. The

depth of his caring is as apparent as his inability to be a provider or to share in day-to-day care taking. Can men do good fathering from behind bars? Definitions of fathering as a set of roles miss this budding expression of good fathering from the young father in prison. The dilemma for practitioners is wanting to set high standards for all fathers, yet wanting to affirm and support the efforts of the 17-year-old father in prison. It becomes clear that we need more than role prescriptions to help us define, understand, and support good fathering.

The generative fathering definition developed by Dollahite, Hawkins, & Brotherson (1997) may be a more useful description of good fathering for practitioners working with fathers who have already failed at one or more of the discrete markers of responsible fatherhood. Generative fathering defines fathering as a developmental process that demands continual efforts towards good fathering. It is not a clear set of roles, and the discrete markers by which responsible fathering can be judged are replaced with more general domains of work. This concept has some appeal because it keeps a high set of standards visible but doesn't set a minimum standard that excludes fathers who may be working towards good fathering after faltering or making initial mistakes. Generative fathering also suggests that the good family man continues to strive towards a high set of ideals as he and his children grow and change.

The generative fathering model will be adopted for this paper because it addresses the need to be more explicit about values, it includes a developmental perspective, and it is more inclusive than some of the previous definitions. Dollahite, Hawkins, & Brotherson (1997) define generative fathering to include four different domains of work that are essential to good fathering:

1. **Ethical work** — Good fathering is inherently ethical and requires men to be good models for their children and to carefully inculcate values.
2. **Stewardship work** — Good fathering involves taking care of the physical needs of families and taking care of the environment/community. This domain extends the notion of provider and protector functions beyond the nuclear family to the wider community.
3. **Developmental work** — Good fathering supports the development of family members through systematic and chaotic change in the family, individuals, and other interacting systems.
4. **Relationship work** — Good fathers develop relationship skills and healthy relationships with children, partners, and community support systems.

In addition to being more inclusive, this model emphasizes the personal growth and development of fathers as a process with clear ideals, not as the accomplishment of a role per se (Dollahite, Hawkins, & Brotherson, 1997). This definition allows practitioners to clearly identify areas where fathers have been taking some steps towards responsible fatherhood and acknowledge those as indicators of good fathering. It also keeps the standards at a high level so that all men can identify ongoing steps that lead to better fathering. This definition allows practitioners to work with men along a continuum of good fathering work without lowering or making standards fuzzy.

This concept of generative fathering also supports practitioners in maintaining multiple goals for fathering programs (Palm, 1997). For example, the ethical work domain might help fathers to look at cultural standards for good fathering or encourage fathers to explore the meaning of healthy sexuality. In the stewardship domain fathers can address issues around and alternatives to the provider role. In the developmental domain fathers may focus on understanding growth and devel-

opment in family members and self. The four domains of good fathering encompass the father's responsibility as provider, the father-child relationship, the co-parenting relationship, and the father as ethical and moral model. Thus, the four domains provide a broad framework that can encompass specific areas of focus for fathering work. It allows practitioners to develop specific goals of good fathering for all fathers, including the 17-year-old unmarried father in prison and the 35-year-old, high-income, married father.

Improving Practice in Fathering Programs

The second major issue that faces fathering programs, after creating a more functional definition of good fathering, is the improvement of program practices. The diversity of programs that have developed and the limited evaluation of program outcomes makes this an important focus. There have been some recent attempts in parent and family education to define the best practices (Family Resource Coalition, 1996). While there is a great deal of overlap between parent programs and fathering programs, there are also some critical differences. Parenting as a generic term uses mothers as the ideal parent and suggests that fathers should live up to the same standards. This assumption works well if androgyny is the long-term goal for all mothers and fathers. A closer look at mothers and fathers reveals some key differences that necessitate a differentiated focus on fathering programs at this point in history (Palm, 1997).

Reflective practice as an approach to improving practice appears to match the complex nature and diverse goals of fathering programs. The inclusion of fathers in parent and family education programs adds a new level of complexity to most parent education and family support efforts. The diversity of current family systems creates a myriad of challenges for practitioners who work directly with fathers and their families. Going beyond the mother-child dyad to include fathers creates new ethical dilemmas that might best be addressed by reflective practice. When a young, unmarried father is asked by society to financially support his child, a fathering program must be able to manage a variety of goals, societal assumptions, legal parameters, and complex family relationships. Reflective practice as an approach helps practitioners to recognize and acknowledge the complex and value-laden terrain of contemporary fatherhood.

A Brief History of Reflective Practice Reflective practice is the conceptual framework that is proposed as a promising way to build effective fathering programs. Reflective practice is a concept that encourages practitioners to integrate research, theory, and experience in approaching the complex work of supporting and educating men to do good fathering. The notion of reflective practice has been emerging in a variety of related disciplines including education, educational administration, and management (Sergiovanni, 1986; Kirby & Paradise, 1992; Schall, 1995). This section will develop a framework for understanding the application of reflective practice to fathering programs. A brief history of the evolution of the concept will be presented, along with a model of the reflective practitioner. Possible impacts of reflective practice on various stake holders will be outlined, and finally, some concrete steps for implementing reflective practice will be identified.

The concept of reflective thinking can be traced back to John Dewey (1933), who described reflective thinking as a distinct mode of thought that involves a state of doubt, perplexity, and

mental difficulty and an act of searching or inquiring to resolve this uncertainty. Dewey also described some of the characteristics of the reflective thinker as: 1) *open-mindedness*— the ability to consider problems in new and different ways without defensiveness; 2) *whole-heartedness*— to be thoroughly engaged by a subject or cause with an enthusiasm for learning; and 3) *responsibility* — knowing why something is worth believing. This notion of reflective thinking fits well with the complex job of educating children. It is in the context of education that reflective practice has continued to evolve, especially during the last 10 years (Sergiovanni, 1986; Kirby & Paradise, 1992; Copeland, Birmingham, de la Cruz, & Lewin, 1993; Loughran, 1996; and Dokecki, 1996).

Schon (1983, 1987) has made important contributions to our current understanding of reflective practice. Schon presents a clear case for the need for reflective practice in professional fields in general. He uses the metaphor of the swamp to describe our current problems as messy and confusing, with no clear-cut technical-rational solutions. While "high ground" represented by academia produces research, theory, and techniques to solve manageable problems, the irony is that "swampland problems" are actually of the greatest concern to people. The issues of child care, welfare reform and family support, and fatherhood all are deep in swamp territory. In addressing the swamp problems the practitioner faces complexity, instability, uniqueness, and value conflicts. The practitioner prepared to meet families in the swamp with technical rationality (i.e., solve the problem by applying academically designed theory and techniques) finds this approach inadequate in many cases. The practitioner meeting with the academic often rejects academic theory and research as irrelevant but is unable to describe what does work in practice and why it works or doesn't work. Schon (1987) traces the rift between research and practice to professionalization in the early part of the 20th century, in which practice based at least partially on artistry was replaced by practice based primarily on scientific knowledge. Schon makes a strong case for better understanding and appreciation of the artistry of the practitioner who is in the swamp, coping with unique problems and uncertainty, yet making progress. He suggests that we study unusually competent practitioners to better understand the art of problem framing, program implementation, and improvisation. Reflective practitioners approach their work in the swamp with intellectual rigor that enables them to reflect on their actions and solve or at least manage the problems in the real (swamp) world. This view of a reflective practitioner raises the status of the practitioner and attempts to reconnect research and practice to bridge the swamp and highlands with a spirit of mutual respect and collaboration.

The notion that practice occurs in a swampland of complexity and uncertainty seems to be appealing as an explanation for the shortcomings of professional knowledge based solely on technical rationality. This concept of the reflective practitioner as one who may bring knowledge based on research and theory but also brings another dimension to successful practice seems to appeal to a variety of different professional groups including educators, social workers, environmentalists, and nurses (Harrison, 1987; Copeland, Birmingham, de la Cruz, & Lewin, 1993; Loughran, 1996). This turn towards reflective practice challenges the traditional hierarchy of knowledge (Schon, 1983) and the current relationships between practitioners and researchers.

Dokecki (1996) stretches the reflective practice paradigm even further in his description of "ethical reflective generative" practice. In this model, all practice is anchored to the ethical center of human development of the client and promoting common good. Dokecki enters the swamp but describes it in more humane terms, pointing out the duality of human nature as both

tragic and comic. The tragic reflects the inevitable imperfection of human actors, and the comic is the good that humans can achieve within limits. Dokecki explores new dimensions of reflective practice by focusing on ethics and the relationship of the client and professional. The reflective practitioner enters a partnership with the client in which they have shared responsibility for reflection. The practitioner generates theory by reflecting upon practice in action. This practice is grounded in generative theory (Dollahite, Hawkins, & Brotherson, 1997), where the practitioner is an inquirer who pursues the development of theory to improve the human situation according to rationally chosen values.

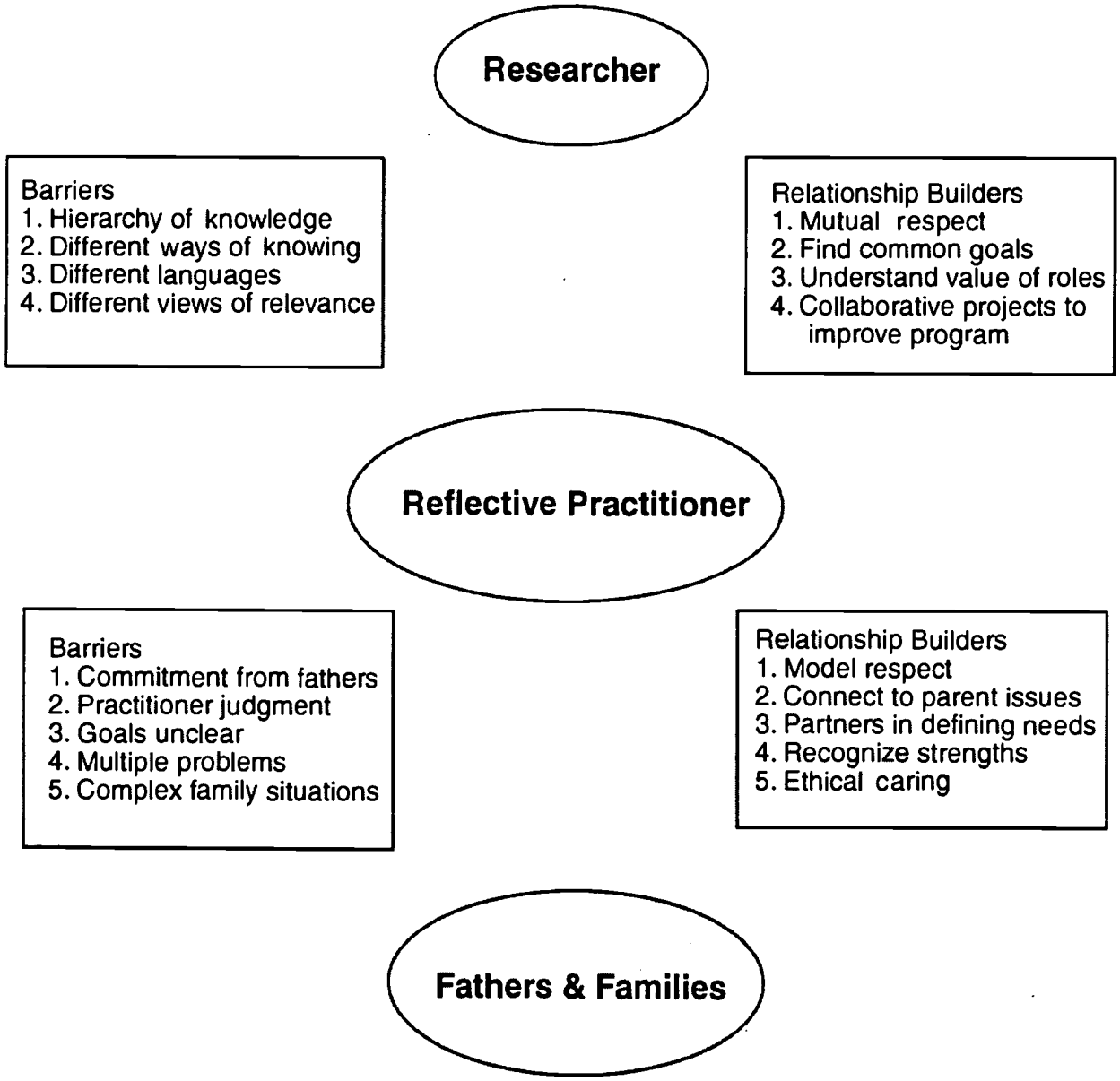
The contributions that Dokecki makes to the model of reflective practice are several. First, the ethical nature of work with parents and families is presented as essential and pervasive, not just an occasional dilemma. The anchoring of the model to generative developmental theory provides a clear sense of direction and goal setting for fathering programs. Finally the emphasis on the client-professional relationship challenges the practitioner to shift the image of the professional from the solitary problem-solver to a collaborative problem-solver.

Model of Reflective Practice for Fathering Programs The basic concept of reflective practice appears to be a good fit with the professional who is working in fathering programs, helping to educate and support good fathering in various family contexts. The model of the reflective practitioner presented in this paper is an attempt to integrate different aspects that have emerged through the evolution of the concept of reflective practice. This integrated model also incorporates the author's observations of numerous practitioners and his own clinical practice in fathering programs. There are practitioners who currently work in fathering programs who embody reflective practice as described here. Their work validates this concept as one that sheds new light on the swamp world of practice in fathering programs.

This model changes the nature of professionalism and places new responsibilities on practitioners to work with both fathers and researchers as partners in reflective practice. The inherent ethical nature of the work and the potential for doing harm are too important to ignore when working in the contemporary swampland of practice with fathers and families. While the expectations for professionals working with fathers may be high in this model, they are based on a generative developmental model that applies to both fathers and professionals. The reflective practitioner continues to develop and refine artistry and intuition over time. The model of reflective practice for fathering programs has three different dimensions. The first dimension is presented in the form of a diagram that depicts relationships among practitioners, fathers, and researchers. The second dimension of the model describes the unique characteristics of reflective practitioners. A third dimension includes a discussion of relevant virtues required for reflective practice in the 1990s.

The model depicted in Figure 1 is an initial attempt to outline the relationships that are most important to reflective practice in fathering programs. The diagram points out the central role of the practitioner and the potential barriers to establishing working relationships with both fathers and researchers. There are also strategies for relationship-building that are included in the diagram. This figure begins to define the parameters of the relationships that are essential to reflective practice in working with fathers in the 1990s. While the model describes one set of relationships most relevant to reflective practice, there may be other partners

Figure 1. Model of the Reflective Practitioner



such as policymakers and social service and legal service professionals that could also be included.

Practitioner Relationships The relationship between the practitioner and father may be hampered by a number of barriers (Johnson & Palm, 1992b) as suggested in Figure 1. These barriers may include the uncertainty of fathers about making a commitment to the program. It takes time to build up a relationship of understanding and mutual respect with fathers. Fathers may also come to the program with a number of problems which they may initially be reluctant to share (Bowman, 1992). Practitioners will need to approach fathers carefully with a sense of respect and acceptance. The model of reflective practice also involves creating a partnership with fathers to define their own goals and shape the program to meet their needs. This partnership is based on shared power and responsibility for the program. The practitioner must engage fathers in this relationship and understand the traditional models of power based on professionalism as a potential barrier. The practitioner must take initial responsibility for creating a relationship with fathers that provides support, affirmation, and respect (Minnesota Council on Family Relations: Ethics Committee, (MCFR), 1995). The practitioner is still responsible for obtaining and improving technical knowledge and skills but understands his or her limits in working with fathers and families.

The second relationship area to consider is the relationship between practitioners and researchers. The practitioner and researcher run into barriers regarding their different views of the world (Schon, 1983) and different values. This set of barriers may be more difficult to overcome. The sense of caring and responsibility that practitioners bring to their relationship with fathers is not part of their relationship with researchers. The main barrier may be the researcher's model of knowledge, which gives limited credibility to the practitioner's contribution to a knowledge base. The practitioner's artistry (Schon, 1987) or intuition is perceived as second rate compared to the researcher's theoretical and empirical knowledge base. This low regard for the practitioner's knowledge creates a tension between practitioners and researchers that can be hard to overcome in forging a mutually respectful and collaborative relationship. Both practitioners and researchers must redefine a model of knowledge that respects their different ways of understanding. Reflective practice offers a model that links research and practice in new ways that can be both mutually respectful and beneficial. Some specific ideas to bridge this gap will be shared in the final section of this paper. The first steps in working together include understanding some basic differences and then joining together for the common purpose of improving practice and the lives of fathers and families.

A third area of relationship-building implied by the reflective practice model but not included in the diagram is peer relationships among practitioners. Professional groups typically support peer relationships that focus on improvement of practice. Since practitioners working in fathering programs come from a variety of professional backgrounds (Levine & Pitt, 1995) there may be limited opportunities for relationships with peers. A peer group may be essential to help define ethical practice and to share both technical and intuitive approaches to working with fathers. Practitioners may have to take some initiative in creating new groups for peer support (e.g., The National Practitioners Network in NCOFF, 1995a; Minnesota Fathering Alliance in Johnson and Palm, 1992a). Reflective practice is not a solitary activity; it involves

respectful relationships among practitioners and between practitioners and fathers and practitioners and researchers. Figure 1 reminds practitioners of the centrality of these relationships to reflective practice and the challenge of establishing and maintaining these relationships.

Characteristics of Reflective Practice Figure 1 portrays the relational context of the reflective practitioner. A second dimension of the model of reflective practice involves a description of the essential characteristics of reflective practice in action (Dokecki, 1996). The following list identifies the essential characteristics of the reflective practitioner:

1. The reflective practitioner recognizes the ethical nature of working with fathers and families.
2. The reflective practitioner maintains a central focus on the goals of enhancing human development and promoting the common good.
3. The reflective practitioner takes responsibility for establishing collaborative relationships with fathers/families and researchers to improve practice.
4. The reflective practitioner takes responsibility for continuing to develop technical expertise based on research, theory, and practice.
5. The reflective practitioner acknowledges the critical role of artistry/intuition in practice and works to better understand, explain, and enhance this artistry.

This description of reflective practice applied to professionals working in fathering programs is an attempt to clarify and raise the standards in the field. This description also creates a new model for thinking about good practice.

"Virtue Ethics" and Reflective Practice A third dimension of the model of reflective practice involves the individual character of the practitioner. This perspective on ethical practice is taken from "virtue ethics" (Jordan & Meara, 1990; Doherty, 1994). Virtue ethics includes a focus on moral competence and individual dispositions to do the right things for the right reasons. In the initial description of reflective thinking, Dewey (1933) referred to specific attitudes that might be construed as virtues. Dokecki (1996) also refers to some specific virtues in his description of reflective practice. The virtue ethics approach to ethical issues brings up the question of what kind of person practitioners should be while working in the swampland. Some of the virtues that may be most relevant in working with fathers and families in the 1990s are the following (Palm, 1994):

1. **Caring** — the disposition to enhance the welfare of fathers and family members as agents of their own lives.
2. **Hope/Optimism** — the disposition to notice strengths in fathers and family members and to stress positive potential.
3. **Prudence** — the disposition to understand competing needs and make difficult and complex decisions based on reflection and consultation.
4. **Patience/Persistence** — the disposition to accept fathers and families where they are and to give time for growth and change to occur.

These virtues are presented as particularly relevant to practitioners working with fathers and families. The virtues provide some important ways of being when confronting difficult ethical issues, and they complement other areas of knowledge and skills.

Reflective Practice in Action How does this model of reflective practice transform actual practice? What does reflective practice look like in fathering programs? There are glimpses of reflective practice in the day-to-day work of effective practitioners. The following examples are offered to illustrate reflective practice in action and to describe some of the potential benefits from adopting reflective practice as a guiding paradigm. The examples focus on three key characteristics: the ethical nature of fathering programs, the importance of collaboration, and the acknowledgment of artistry.

The reflective practice paradigm emphasizes the ethical nature of working with fathers. For example, a father who wants to reconnect with a child after 15 years of absence creates some ethical dilemmas for the reflective practitioner. The principles of "best interests of the child" and "fathers are important in children's lives" may clash in this situation. How long should the practitioner pursue this "reconnection" in the face of major emotional distress from the child? A practitioner begins to work with an 18-year-old incarcerated father. His child is born while he is in prison. He wants to change his ways and realizes a new sense of responsibility as a father to his newborn daughter. He is not married to the 16-year-old mother. The mother's family advises her to "move on" and stay away from the young father. The practitioner wants to build on the young father's motivation to rehabilitate and grow into responsible fatherhood. Many dilemmas may emerge from potential clashes between the rights and interests of the father, the mother, the mother's family, the child, and the "fragile family" that has been created. Reflective practice will not provide simple answers to these situations. However, it will help practitioners to recognize the ethical nature of their work and to advocate for fathers with greater understanding and appreciation of complex family systems.

Reflective practice as an approach also supports more collaboration with researchers. The careful evaluation of fathering programs is one area where researchers and practitioners must work together. Reflective practice emphasizes collaboration with an ethic of mutual respect. The researcher and practitioner can work together to define a program's intended outcomes and how to best assess these outcomes. Practitioners who have worked with fathers understand some of the growth trajectories that fathers exhibit. This insight can be used to build a model of father growth and development. The researcher brings the skills of systematic measurement, while the practitioner brings the relevant content and focus. Fathering programs offer many creative opportunities for researchers and practitioners to collaborate. Some of these will be outlined in the final section of this paper.

Levine and Pitt (1995) describe numerous examples of effective practice through their "tips," gathered from various practitioners. These tips illustrate the artistry and the insight of practitioners. They include advice like "expect participation," "work from an asset model," and "provide settings where fathers can feel sufficiently secure to open up." Behind a tip may be years of practice to fine-tune recruitment and thoughtful reflection to generate theories about fathers' behavior. Reflective practice would help the field to appreciate the thinking and efforts behind these tips and to explore and develop the notion of artistry and intuitive insights gained from practice.

While scattered fragments of reflective practice can be gleaned from current fathering programs, the real contribution of a reflective practice model lies in the integration of the

principles outlined in this paper. Reflective practice illuminates the day-to-day activities in fathering programs, shedding light on the ethical dilemmas, encouraging creative collaboration, and fostering greater understanding and respect for the practitioner as artist.

Implications of Reflective Practice

The model of reflective practice proposed in this paper has several implications. It introduces a new paradigm of professionalism for practitioners that emphasizes artistry and intuition, collaborative relationships with parents as well as researchers, and new approaches to ethics. The first part of this section will examine potential positive and negative impacts of reflective practice on the primary actors in fathering programs. The next part outlines some possible activities that support reflective practice in action. The final part presents an agenda for collaboration between practitioners and researchers.

Stake Holder Impacts of Reflective Practice The adoption of a reflective practice paradigm has many potential impacts upon programs, fathers, researchers, and practitioners. A brief analysis of some of the potential positive and negative impacts is given in Table 1. This table is presented as an overview of possible impacts to initiate a dialogue about reflective practice.

Table 1: Potential Impacts of Reflective Practice on Fathering Programs

Stake holders	Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts
Practitioners	1. Creates high but clear standards 2. Helps clarify ethical practice work 3. Opportunities to work with more researchers 4. Affirms artistry/intuition as a legitimate approach	1. More time needed for collaboration 2. More challenged by ethical dimensions of 3. Work becomes complex
Programs	1. New relationships with parents 2. More involvement with research and researchers 3. Ethical practice emphasized 4. Human development a clear focus	1. Cost of time to staff 2. Cost of professional development 3. System more complex and difficult to manage
Fathers	1. More responsibility for own goals 2. More connected to program and program development 3. Benefit from improved practice	1. Higher expectations for commitment
Researchers	1. Opportunities to learn from practitioners 2. New possibilities for research	1. Loss in status of role 2. More complex model of working with programs

This preliminary analysis suggests that the reflective practice model has potential for creating some important positive impacts for all stake holders. There are also some significant costs if programs

are not already providing time for collaboration and professional development. The complexity of the model and high standards will raise expectations and create the need for new skills in collaboration, ethical thinking, and applied research on the part of practitioners.

Supporting Reflective Practice This model clearly places major responsibility on practitioners to adjust their approaches and relationships to become more reflective. There is a major assumption that professionals in fathering programs have basic technical skills and knowledge to move into this level of practice and to see the benefits of pursuing a more reflective style of practice. For some practitioners, the model will be an affirmation and articulation of the approach they already bring to their work with fathers and families. Practitioners must see the model as improving their understanding of current practice and providing new ways to assist fathers and families. The model suggests some critical changes in the meaning and practice of professionalism. It also raises standards and expectations, which may demand additional training and more time and effort.

Reflective practice must also be supported by program administrators. They can support reflective practice in a variety of ways, for example, by providing the following:

1. More meeting time among staff to promote integrated services and greater reflection.
2. Staff development opportunities to support reflective practice.
3. Opportunities for staff and researchers to work together.
4. Time for professional networking with peers from other programs.

These resources and a positive attitude towards this style of practice will encourage practitioners to be more reflective.

Agenda for Practitioner/Researcher Collaboration One of the critical supports for reflective practice is collaboration between practitioners and researchers. The following activities are presented as some practical steps to promote a closer relationship between practitioners and researchers.

1. Development of quality indicators — This project would involve a careful review of both research and practice literature to develop a set of indicators for fathering programs that could be used by programs as a self-assessment tool. There are some existing instruments for related programs (Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning, 1994; RMC Research Corporation, 1995; and Johnson & Palm, 1995) that could serve as both resources and models for this activity.
2. Development of ethical thinking and practice—One of the important points articulated in the reflective practice model presented is the pervasiveness of ethical issues in working with fathers and families. This is an area where the traditional approaches to developing codes of ethics based on principles may not be adequate. Practitioners and researchers/ theorists could join together to develop more relevant and useful approaches to ethical understanding and practice (Palm, 1994).
3. Identification of staff knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to reflective practice— As the need for fathering programs increases, practitioners and researchers can come together to outline some of the specific technical skills and knowledge that are most important for practitioners (Cooke, Danforth, Foster, Palm, Rossman, & Wolthius, 1995). Pre-service and In-service training for staff must be designed around a core knowledge base. Practitioners have an important role in identifying knowledge, skills and dispositions that support reflective practice.

4. Examination of virtues most relevant to practitioners working with fathers—The development of a virtue ethics for practitioners working in fathering programs is another area where theorists/researchers and practitioners could come together to identify the essential set of virtues that are most important and relevant to supporting reflective practice (Jordan & Meara, 1990). The virtues identified in this paper could be used as a starting place to discuss the essential dispositions of reflective practitioners in fathering programs.
5. Exploration of artistry/intuition of practitioners — Practitioners and researchers can join together to develop methods to better understand the development and application of artistry (Schon, 1987) and intuition as part of reflective practice in fathering programs. This provides researchers with a new area of study and provides credibility to non-technical skills that reflective practitioners have developed.
6. Study of successful collaborations of researchers and practitioners in fathering programs —Researchers and practitioners can identify activities in fathering programs that have successfully brought researchers and practitioners together and improved their relationships. Reflection and inquiry into these relationships may be a powerful way for both groups to gain insight into different ways of thinking about collaboration and new ways to work together.
7. Study of staff development—Researchers and practitioners can explore the process of staff development of reflective practice attitudes and behaviors over time. This effort can begin to identify developmental paths and the important influences of staff development on reflective practice.
8. Program Evaluation — Program evaluation in fathering programs is still sparse (McBride, 1990, 1991) and offers some interesting opportunities for researchers and practitioners to work together to develop new instruments and processes for evaluating programs. Researchers and practitioners can be very effective in working together to develop approaches to evaluation (Palm & Hoodecheck, 1990; Cooke, 1992; Mueller, 1996).

SUMMARY

This paper has articulated a model of reflective practice that can be applied to a wide variety of fathering programs. This model includes a definition of good fathering as generative fathering that addresses the inherent tensions of absolutist and relativist approaches. The model of reflective practice provides a new way of thinking about professionalism and descriptions of the important relationships between practitioners and fathers and practitioners and researchers. The major challenge of this model is for researchers and practitioners to construct or rebuild a relationship based on respect for each others' work and perspectives. A number of concrete activities are suggested as collaborative projects for researchers and practitioners. The model of reflective practice outlined for fathering programs could also be extended to parenting programs in general. Reflective practice as a conceptual framework has the potential to help improve current practice by emphasizing the importance of practitioner relationships, acknowledging the complexity of goals in fathering programs, and exploring the artistry of practitioners.

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